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SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT FORMATION UPDATE: JABIRI PUSHES FOR  
COUNTER-BLOC TO SHAKE UP UIC AND GET NOMINATION

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Fadhila Party leader Nadim al-Jabiri told the Ambassador February 7 that he plans to push off the Shia alliance vote on the premiership until February 10. Jabiri said that he is convinced that Iraq is heading toward anarchy, not democracy, and that he believes that the nomination of SCIRI's Adil Abd al-Mahdi or Dawa's Ibrahim al-Jafari could eliminate the chance for unity. Jabiri added that he would be prepared to withdraw from the Shia alliance if the Kurds, Allawi, Tawafuq and others formed a counter-bloc and nominated him for the premiership. Jabiri predicted that such a move would shake up the United Iraqi Coalition (UIC, the Shia alliance) and cause other elements in the Shia alliance to back him. President Talabani told the Ambassador later in the day that he would not consent to form such a counter-bloc, believing it would antagonize the Shia and only produce a stalemate.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY CONTINUED: Ayad Allawi told the Ambassador separately that he is only a few seats short of a coalition that could bloc the Shia and Talabani from achieving a two-thirds majority. Allawi said he would need only Jabiri or Masoud Barzani to break ranks in order to complete his blocking coalition. Barzani separately told the Ambassador that he could not accept the combination of a Talabani presidency and an Abd al-Mahdi premiership. Barzani said that, if Abd al-Mahdi receives the nomination, he might be ready to break ranks during the secret ballot on the presidency in order to prevent Talabani from winning a two-thirds majority. END SUMMARY.

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Jabiri Sticking With His Candidacy  
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¶3. (C) Fadhila Party leader Nadim al-Jabiri told the Ambassador February 7 that he remains committed to his own candidacy for PM and that he plans to push off a UIC vote on the issue until Saturday, February 11. Jabiri said that neither of his competitors -- Abd al-Mahdi and Jafari -- are unifying figures, and both, he added, could push Iraq toward civil war. "There is a fine line between anarchy and democracy and we have crossed it in the direction of anarchy," he said. Jabiri, showing his background as a political science professor, cited Plato and said that anarchy breeds tyranny and that tyrants rarely emerge from the majority. In Jabiri's opinion, Iraq could be heading toward another Sunni Arab tyranny. "They have the experience and the people," he said. Jabiri said that both Abd al-Mahdi and Jafari have offered him major inducements to back their candidacies, but he said he has rebuffed them because he believes the stakes are too high.

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#### Jabiri Pushes For a Counter-Bloc

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¶4. (C) Jabiri argued again that the way to boost his candidacy would be for all parties outside the UIC to form a counter-bloc. This bloc, larger than the UIC, would have the right to nominate its candidate for prime minister. If that bloc nominated Jabiri, he said, it would defuse the situation and demonstrate a sincere desire to build bridges. At that point, Jabiri said, he would turn to his colleagues on the UIC and ask them to accept this nomination. If they refuse, he would argue that they simply had taken an anti-Fadhila position. At this point he could withdraw and the street would understand, he said. More importantly, he noted, his nomination alone would shake up the UIC and allow him to draw in more supporters.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador warned that if such a large counter-bloc formed it would be more likely to nominate someone from its own ranks, like Allawi. Jabiri, the Ambassador pointed out, is waiting for the nomination to be served up to him rather than working for it. Jabiri could tell the UIC that he will withdraw if not nominated by their bloc and use that as an excuse to pull out when the UIC ignores his demand. Jabiri said that he has to study the "production" of such a film and that he would be back in touch. He also lamented that sectarianism is now so rife in the Shia community that Shia seem more concerned about the unity of the UIC coalition than they about the unity of the country.

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#### Talabani Pushes Accepting Abd al-Mahdi With Conditions

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¶6. (C) President Talabani told the Ambassador later on February 7 that he does not believe that Jabiri has a serious shot at the premiership. Talabani said he doubts that Jabiri could ever assemble a two-thirds coalition behind him. This means, he added, that the formation of a counter-bloc that nominates Jabiri would only lead to a stalemate. More importantly, Talabani doubted that the Fadhila Party's spiritual leader, Shaykh Ya'acubi, would ever actually permit Jabiri to withdraw from the UIC. Ya'acubi, Talabani said, is still bound by the broad dictates of the marja'ia, which would oppose such a move. Instead of going about this approach, Talabani argued that all sides should put conditions on Abd al-Mahdi's candidacy and support him on that basis. Talabani also noted, however, that Jafari has a very real shot at the job, especially since Talabani said he has heard that Iran has made clear that it does not object to his candidacy.

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#### Allawi Works on a Blocking Coalition

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¶7. (C) Ayad Allawi told the Ambassador separately that he is only a few seats short of a coalition that could bloc the Shia and Talabani from achieving a two-thirds majority. Allawi said that he has gathered a bloc of some 88 seats but needs at least 5 more to reach 93 -- the magic number to bloc a two-thirds majority. Allawi noted that he needs only Jabiri or Masoud Barzani to break ranks in order to complete the blocking coalition.

¶8. (C) The Ambassador separately heard that leaders of the Tawafuq Front, Allawi's list, and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) met on February 6 and concluded that they cannot accept the combination of an Abd al-Mahdi premiership and a Talabani presidency. One of the two men would have to go, they concluded. Barzani had told the Ambassador that he might be ready to break ranks during the secret ballot on the presidency and thereby prevent Talabani from winning a two-thirds majority.

KHALILZAD